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In Memoriam: Leo J. Paulissen, 1915 – 1993



Dr. Leo Paulissen passed away on April 11, 1993 at Washington Regional Hospital in Fayetteville. He is survived by his wife, Rita, of Fayetteville, three sons, a daughter, two brothers, and a sister.

The son of Andrew and Marie Paulissen, he was born on November 8, 1915 at Kankakee, Illinois where he attended high school. He received his B.S. with highest honor from Bradley Polytechnic Institute in 1941 and his M.S. from the University of Chicago in 1949. His Ph.D. was completed in 1954 at Washington University in St. Louis.

His professional career began as a bacteriologist and serologist at the diagnostic laboratories of the Illinois Department of Health in Chicago, Illinois from 1946 to 1950. He was a research assistant and later a research associate in bacteriology and immunology at Washington University between 1951 and 1954. He joined the Department of Botany and Bacteriology at the University of Arkansas as a Research Associate in 1954, advancing to the academic rank of professor in 1968, a position he held until his retirement in 1986.

I first met Leo when I came to the University in 1957. I will always remember his kindness and help in finding a place to live. It has been a friendship that has lasted for many years. I remember him particularly well as a hard-working colleague who was always there to help with problems concerning departmental administration, scheduling, and managing the microbiology programs. His service for many years as Director of Summer Science Institutes sponsored by the National Science Foundation was an outstanding contribution to further training of high school science teachers and the consequent improvement in science education in Arkansas and the surrounding states.

His most notable research was on the effects of ionizing radiation on cellular and humoral immunity. He continued research in bacteriology and immunology during his later years, but because of heavy teaching and administrative loads his more recent research activities speak mostly through the theses and dissertations of his many graduate students.

In addition to his regular laboratory work in microbiology, Leo was an excellent field man. He was particularly interested in butterflies and moths and made extensive collections. He was meticulous in identification and documenting the distribution of his collections, most of which are now deposited with the Department of Entomology Museum. I recall the many pleasant times we shared on field trips to different types of forest and prairie ecosystems. He was busy collecting moths and butterflies while I was collecting field data for studies on plant communities.

After retirement as emeritus professor, Leo was in his office nearly every day documenting his work and writing until he was no longer able to be there because of failing health. His office contained shelves and file cabinets stacked with boxes of insect collections, books, and professional journals arranged as tunnels throughout except for a small space occupied by his desk and one chair for visitors. However, when asked for information, Leo knew exactly where everything was and could almost always locate any item he wanted immediately.

He was absolutely devoted to his undergraduate teaching and work with his graduate students. I have been unable to determine how many students he taught, but I can say that his undergraduate students numbered in the thousands, and he trained more microbiology graduate students than anyone else in the department. His former graduate students today occupy important positions as university faculty members or research workers and administrators with government agencies and in industry, attesting to the soundness of his tutelage.

He was an army veteran serving in the Pacific Theater during World War II. He received the Pacific campaign medal, two bronze stars, a meritorious unit award, and the World War II victory medal.

He was a member of the American Society for Microbiology and a long-time member of the Arkansas Academy of Science. He served the Academy for many years as a member of the executive committee, Chairman of the Arkansas Biota Survey Committee, and Director of the Westinghouse Talent Search Committee, which sought to recognize potential young scientists in the high schools. Also he was former Secretary-Treasurer of the U. of A. Chapter of Sigma Xi and was serving as its President at the time of his death.

He was held in highest regard by his colleague, students, and friends for his integrity and competence. We are all privileged to have known and worked with him, and we all miss him.

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